



ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2014/2015

Who Speaks? The Global History of Intellectual Practices: Epistemological, Political, and Ethical Challenges

Thursday, January 29th, 2015, 6 pm

Why we Need to Study Intellectual Practice Elsewhere: Conceptual and Ethnographic Reflections from the Swahili Coast

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

By Prof. Kai Kresse (Columbia University, New York)

Intellectual practice refers to social and verbal action that is concerned with knowledge, theoretical orientation and practical guidance about one's actions within society. The lecture will discuss this issue as a research focus and field of study, with a view to its potential value as a pathway for social analysis that draws from internal conceptions. It asks whether a focus on intellectual practice, by avoiding established analytical divisions of social analysis, may lead to useful conceptual re-calibrations towards alternative (less Eurocentric) models of (re)thinking society.

Focusing on intellectual practice attends to both unity and diversity in Swahili Muslim contexts. It sheds light on the implicit conceptual and normative unity that underlies the social community. A central aspect for understanding society is looking at complementary aspects of language such as shared concepts and speech acts in mutual references and religious inferences. The Swahili case studies offer a view to socially embedded 'ordinary ethics' in everyday life (following Michael Lambek) and the Islamic principle of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' (following Michael Cook). They show internal diversity of voices and opinions that occur in Swahili Muslim publics which generate specific arguments and reasoning processes about knowledge, truth, and justice – what is right and what needs to be done.

Kai Kresse is Associate Professor of African & Swahili Studies at the MESAAS Department, Columbia University. He is the author of 'Philosophising in Mombasa' (2007) and currently working on a monograph on the postcolonial experience of coastal Muslims in Kenya, explored through discursive case studies.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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